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‘DEBT-BONDAGE AND TRAFFICKING: DON’T BELIEVE THE HYPE’

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The anti-trafficking lobby built up through the early 1990s to a peak at the UN Conference on Women/NGO Forum held in Beijing during September 1995, yet trafficking is an aspect of the mythology surrounding Asian sex workers which remains poorly defined even in conventions and laws against the trafficking of women (David 1995). One of the goals of the anti-trafficking lobby at the UN conference was a new UN Convention to replace the 1949 Convention on the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others, in which Article I condemns anyone who ‘procures’ or ‘exploits’ a prostitute, ‘even with the consent of that person’. There was relatively little attention paid to ‘trafficking’ after the 1949 convention, until the late 1980s surge of concern about ‘sex tourism’. In April 1993 a conference was organized by the Coalition Against Trafficking of Women (CATW) ‘to heighten awareness of the sex trade and to stem the sale of humans into bondage’ (*Asia Watch*, 1993: p. 149). The latest intense phase of publicity began with two conferences on trafficking held at the end of 1994: The First International Conference on the Trafficking of Women in Chiang Mai, Thailand from 17–21 October (which established the feminist-based Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, the GAATW) and the International Conference on Traffic in Persons in Utrecht, the Netherlands from 15–19 November, 1994.

Many people have been misled into thinking that trafficking (and child prostitution and sex tourism) are enormous problems for Australia and Southeast Asia. Meanwhile Australian and other sex workers, at the UN conference and through its aftermath, set out an alternative view so that, before people dig in their pockets for a donation, sign a petition or join an anti-trafficking group, they would try to consider the sex workers’ perspective and the implications of this lobby for the workers in sex trades. A version of this chapter and a position statement supported by most of the Australian sex workers’ rights organizations formed part of the vigorous discussions at Beijing, where the anti-trafficking movement lost much of its credibility.

Sex work is diverse and context-specific, related to the combination of local conditions and the forces of economic globalization, the AIDS discourse and legislation which creates the space for exploitation and violence by criminalizing prostitutes and restricting travel. The most extreme lobby, represented by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, formed in the United States in 1991, has an underlying agenda of abolishing prostitution. They try to fulfil this agenda

by linking all forms of the sex trade together beneath an emphasis on emotive words like 'trafficking', 'slavery' and 'child prostitution'. Meanwhile, in discussion at Beijing, the Global Alliance has distinguished itself from the Coalition by clarifying that it does not take an abolitionist stand on prostitution and is also open to the sex workers' perspective. Support of sex workers' rights is part of a larger postmodern challenge to conventional feminism, which allows for a cacophony of voices and refuses the binary dichotomy in which all women are constituted as 'other'. Feminism which fails to overcome binary oppositions ends up supporting the status quo, impoverishing women and aligning with right-wing fundamentalism and a discourse which has its genesis in homophobia.

DEFINING TRAFFICKING

There are at least three different 'camps' with different ideas about trafficking: the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women, led by Kathleen Barry, the Global Alliance, which also claims to be feminist but only opposes 'forced' prostitution and various sex workers' rights activists who dismiss the free/forced distinction and claim that the 'harms' of prostitution are actually caused by moral attitudes and their legal consequences. The word trafficking can be applied to any kind of commodities being traded or bartered, however it also has sinister and illicit implications, in this case being used with the implicit assumption that it is women and girls who are being transacted as non-consenting prostitutes to fulfil male sexual desires. The position of Barry and the Coalition is that trafficking is part of the general exploitation of women according to the feminist principle that male sexuality under patriarchy is about power, not sex and thus all prostitution is coercive (see also Sullivan 1996).

If all prostitution is violence against women, it seems that any migration of sex workers can become 'trafficking', as in Coalition member Sheila Jeffreys' statement: 'As men use women in sex tourism in different countries they then demand these women to be trafficked into their country' (*West Australian*, 13 December 1995). Jeffreys has also said that 'prostitution is a form of sexual violence affecting women's bodies, their health and self-image, and undermines other gains women have made ... Once we remove women's subordination in society there will not be prostitution' (*West Australian*, 13 December 1995). In the *LA Times* another Coalition member, Janice Raymond, has published an editorial, 'Prostitution is rape that's paid for' (11 December 1995).

The Utrecht conference produced a definition emphasizing force rather than the nature of work to be performed in its final statement (1994):

The traffic in persons is not only for purposes of prostitution, but for a range of other activities as well.... It is important to emphasize that the element that defines traffic is force and not the nature of the labor to be performed. ... The trafficker cannot use as a defense the fact that the person is or was at any time, for example, a prostitute or a domestic worker.

Similarly, after the Chiang Mai conference, the Global Alliance defined trafficking as forced labor where people are lured or deceived into forms of contemporary slavery: more specifically, as a feminist alliance they refer to the movement of 'women' in order to 'subject them to power' (*STV News Bulletin* #3, July 1995). A draft document, 'Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Trafficked Persons' published in the *STV News Bulletin*, says 'the trafficked persons shall be treated as migrant laborers and therefore be protected by the International Labor Organization', the emphasis being on opportunities for retraining and the chance to 'start a new life', the meaning of which is unclear, but implies a moral preference for anything else over prostitution. The Global Alliance worked with sex worker groups at Beijing but their conceptual position is confused, since the 'free/forced' distinction is untenable.

The movement of sex trade workers into and out of Thailand has been a major focus for lobbyists and the subject of the Asia Watch report, *A Modern Form of Slavery: Trafficking of Burmese Women and Girls into Brothels in Thailand*. The report was publicized with a tour of Australia by the researchers from 1–13 May 1995, supported by the International Women's Development Agency (IWDA). *A Modern Form of Slavery* was also the main source for the trafficking section of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade report on Burma (JSC 1995: pp. 48–53). This report refers to appalling conditions, social ills, victims, etc, without any other evidence, and extends the supposed trafficking to Sydney: 'the main center appears to be Sydney where there were at least twenty brothels' (1995: p. 52). Scarlet Alliance's response notes that the committee failed to contact Australian sex worker organizations which are in touch with Burmese and Thai workers (correspondence, 4 January 1996). While the report says 'there might be 200 Asian prostitutes working in Australia', there are actually around two thousand of whom ninety per cent are Australian residents (Brokett and Murray 1994).

In other usages, the IWDA leaflet says that Burmese women and girls are 'trafficked – sold lured or tricked – into slavery in Thai brothels', while in the media, 'the traffic in flesh is a horror of exploitation that shames the world's conscience' (Hornblower 1993: p. 14). It is not only the media which sensationalizes the issues. A UNESCO report on Contemporary Forms of Slavery (1995) uses the terms trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation interchangeably and refers to them as sordid, dangerous and inhuman. As David comments, 'exploitation of prostitution' is a vague term which in itself is not an adequate reason to prohibit prostitution (1995: pp. 1–5). The UNESCO document also makes a reactionary, unsupported and culturally vague demand for 'strengthening the family nucleus and respect for moral values', as a solution to the 'problem'. Conversely, sex workers state that it is precisely the moral hypocrisy of global capitalism and sexual repression, including the criminalization of prostitutes, which creates the space for exploitation, discrimination and negative attitudes towards female sexuality (PROS et al. 1995).

The UN Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women, Radhika Coomaraswamy, has made a contextualized report on prostitution and trafficking which states:

'A discussion of prostitution must accept the premise that prostitution as a phenomenon is the aggregate of social and sexual relations which are historically, culturally and personally specific. The only common denominator shared by the international community of prostitutes is an economic one: prostitution is an income generating activity' (Coomaraswamy 1995, Article 205; see also Rubin 1975: p. 175).

She goes on to make the point that sex workers are generally well-paid compared to other workers. Coomaraswamy's section on trafficking appears to be largely based on the Asia Watch report, describing conditions in Thailand as 'appalling' and referring to an incident where five workers were burned to death when they were chained to the beds in a brothel and could not escape. A contrast can be made with the case of more than two hundred Thai women who burned to death in a Thai toy factory because the exit doors were locked, and similar cases in US sweatshops (Priscilla Alexander, personal correspondence 18 August 1995, also reports in the *New York Times*, 4 August 1995, 12 August 1995, 25 February 1996), the point being that exploitative and dangerous conditions can be found across a range of industries internationally.

The shadowy nature of 'trafficking' may be due to the cunning of the 'traffickers' or it may be because they don't exist. At any rate it is difficult to estimate the scale of these issues. The link with child prostitution makes the debate even more emotive and can be manipulated to sideline the position of Western sex workers (Murray, forthcoming). The Norwegian government has very boldly informed the Council of Europe that 'Every year, one million children are either kidnapped, bought or in other ways forced to enter the sex market' (Black 1994: p. 12). Estimates of 'child' sex workers

in Thailand range up to 800,000 under-18-year-olds, according to US Secretary of State for Human Rights John Shattuck, which would mean about a quarter of all teenage girls (*Bangkok Post*, 25 December 1994).

The End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism (ECPAT) brochure says, 'On a global scale millions of children have been forced into prostitution' and 'tourists create a demand for more than one million "fresh" child prostitutes every year'. None of these figures are referenced, nor do they explain what research has been done, if any. Thai NGOs apparently estimate that there are two million sex workers in Thailand (Asia Watch 1993: p. 16), while the IWDA campaign says that over ten thousand women and girls are trafficked into Thailand each year, as in the Asia Watch report, which also says that fifty to seventy per cent of them become infected with HIV.

A MODERN FORM OF SLAVERY

While it is not clear where the figures for 'trafficking' come from originally, it is books like *A Modern Form of Slavery* which help them to become accepted fact through the repetition of the rhetoric. This report from Asia Watch is written in a quasi-academic style, where tabloid journalism is footnoted, referenced, and hence legitimated. The book is referred to in academic papers, and it is the major source behind sections of Australian government and UN documents. The book and speaking tour put the issue back in the news, although the expert researchers conveniently chose to remain anonymous.

The authors did not actually visit brothels, but interviewed thirty workers ('victims') who had been arrested and taken to shelters or detention centers. While ostensibly giving these workers a voice, their statements are selectively reinterpreted by the 'experts', and may be read differently by other sex workers. On the one hand, it is emphasized that the women say that they did not know the type of work they were going to do. Since prostitution is illegal in Thailand and the workers were interviewed in detention, it seems logical that they would say this to avoid prosecution, as do migrant sex workers everywhere in an effort to avoid deportation. On the other hand, it seems to be the norm for the women to find their own way out of Burma with prior knowledge of where to find brothel agents. The report claims that they are tricked, but if this is the case they seem to be so stupid they can be duped twice, as they are 'taken for deportation to the Thai-Burmese border where they are often lured back into prostitution by brothel agents'. Where they have made it home and boasted about the money they made, this is described as lying to 'save face', even when they have gone on to recruit others for the brothels or returned to work themselves. 'Their return to prostitution was voluntary only in the sense that they saw their first experience as having rendered them unfit for anything else' (Asia Watch 1993: p. 74).

The women are described as fleeing the repressive regime and poverty in Burma, which contradicts the stated aim of 'rescuing' the women and returning them home. There is a fairly well-substantiated rumor that HIV-positive Burmese women returned to Burma have been executed by the ruling SLORC authorities: even if this is untrue it seems inhumane to advocate returning these women to a country where there is no care, support or treatment available for HIV-positive people. The women are described as having limited understanding of HIV or AIDS, in fact the demand for them in Thailand is said to be linked to the myth that Burmese women are free of AIDS. The rapid rise in HIV infections may be related to the growth of the heroin trade and injecting drugs in the border area, or to the sharing of needles for antibiotics and contraceptives at health centers and among the workers themselves, however there is little information available about this.

There is evidence to support the claims of serious abuses by Thai police and immigration authorities. This abuse has been made possible by criminalizing the industry while there continues to be a high demand for female sex workers. The

large amounts of money at stake encourage the bribery and corruption of the Thai authorities, and unregulated, substandard working conditions (*Asia Watch* 1993: pp. 67–8). At a conference launching the *Asia Watch* report in a Thai translation, a Thai police officer named Surasek disputed its findings: ‘At present, most of these Burmese girls come here to work in brothels of their own free will. Very few of the women we meet in our day-to-day work say they were lured into the business’ (*The Nation*, 5 April 1995). He also pointed out that ‘police had great difficulty securing convictions against agents who recruit women for the flesh trade since very few prostitutes are willing to identify or testify against these agents in a court of law’.

It is tempting to wonder why the *Asia Watch* women want to expose the ‘horrors’ in Thailand as opposed to some cases in the United States such as HIV prevalence among sex workers in the black housing projects in Oakland, or the treatment of immigrants (even legal ones) in sweatshops and in the United States in general. Meanwhile UNICEF reports that the United States has 300,000 prostitutes under 18, more than its own estimates for all Asian countries put together (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 December 1995). Perhaps the ‘researchers’ know that as guests in Thailand, which is so dependent on tourism income, they enjoy a level of protection which they would not find in US housing projects.

TRAFFICKING AND FEMALE LABOR MIGRATION

The IWDA campaign over Burmese women tried to link the situation with Thai women arriving in Sydney in its media release. By equating Australian conditions with those in Thailand, they conjured up dens of iniquity full of juveniles held against their will, such as the media periodically sensationalizes. Matheson introduces a typical article:

One of thousands of women from Thailand, the Philippines, Malaysia and China trafficked to Australia and other First World countries by crime syndicates each year, Susie is the face of contemporary poverty. That her job as a debt bonded sex worker is the best economic option available to her is a metaphor for most of the world’s women, whose grinding impoverishment in the Third World is accelerating (Matheson 1994).

The exaggerations of the anti-trafficking groups only make things worse for the workers, such that representatives of three sex worker organizations in Sydney PROS, SWOP, QEWF, the Sydney Sexual Health Center multicultural health promotion project and Asian sex workers met to develop a policy statement on the alleged trafficking of Asian sex workers in Australia (PROS et al 1995). Thai workers in Australia are variously involved with a complex array of big and small operators, such as agents in Bangkok, passport forgers in Kuala Lumpur and travel agents in Singapore, so that they arrive with debts of up to \$30,000. However I have shown elsewhere (Brockett and Murray 1994; and see David 1995) that conditions vary greatly. Most of these women enter their contracts willingly, and if they can pay off their debt, they may become recruiters or brothel managers themselves.

Because the sex industry is not fully decriminalized and sex workers cannot obtain work visas freely, some of the terms and conditions of contracts are exploitative and working conditions may be poor. Australia’s own racist policies contribute to exploitation, since young women from the United Kingdom and Canada have no problem getting working visas under bilateral agreements, while, according to Australian immigration officials, ‘no young attractive woman, and by that I mean a woman under sixty, is going to get a visa in Bangkok unless she is dripping with gold or has a business background’ (David 1995: p. 45). Through their Operation Paper Tiger, the Australian authorities have deported eighty Thai workers in two years under the 1958 Migration Act, and the continuing crackdown pushes up the cost of the bonds. Attempts by women in detention to claim refugee status have so far been unsuccessful. Workers who are persecuted,

arrested and deported before they pay off their debts are left with nothing for their hard work and, since they have to pay for deportation, they may end up further indebted. Police and immigration activity depresses business and means that workers have to hide their activities. This makes it harder for them to be contacted by support organizations providing information, condoms and HIV/AIDS information.

Asian workers who seek employment in the sex industry in Australia do so for the money, just as Australian workers do. Workers should be free to move to seek better pay and conditions just as many Australian workers go to work in Japan and Hong Kong. My experience is that workers are aware of the kind of work they will do when they enter the contract; in the very rare cases when workers have been trapped by false promises, of course, this is unacceptable. The Prostitutes Collective of Victoria has argued for working visas to be made available, 'thereby publicly diffusing the mythology of the "coerced innocent"' (PCV 1995), and David (1995) has made a strong case for easier short-term working visas and sponsorship by brothels.

The anti-trafficking campaigns actually have a detrimental effect on workers and increase discrimination as they perpetuate the stereotype of Asian workers as passive and diseased. Clients are encouraged to think of Asian workers as helpless victims who are unable to resist, so they may be more likely to violate the rights of these workers. The campaigns also encourage racism towards Asian workers within the industry (where Australian workers accuse them of undercutting and not using condoms) and in the general community where Asian workers form an ostracized new 'underclass' without equal rights (Brockett and Murray 1994).

The movement of sex workers around the region reflects economic differentials and a transnational division of labor: Thai workers head for Australia, Europe and Japan, while Burmese, Chinese and Indo-Chinese enter Thailand. But sex work is not the only job where the prospects vary so much from place to place that people are prepared to take on debts and forged paperwork. There has been a general rapid increase in migration, from Asia to the West, and a dramatic reversal of the gender balance so that there are now many more women involved in the largest mass migration in human history (see, for example, Heyzer et al. 1994). The majority are employed on a contractual basis as foreign domestic workers (the 'maid trade') in situations which often involve debts, exploitation and sexual abuse – conditions exposed in the media following the 1995 case of Filipina worker, Flor Contemplacion, who was hanged in Singapore. Similarly in Indonesia where domestic workers 'bring in significant foreign revenue and make rich men and women of those in the body business' (IRIP 1995: p. 27), there are frequent reports of exploitation and abuse and yet increasing numbers of migrants.

Expectations are raised by the consumer images beamed in by television, and any life is seen as better relative to a poor existence in the village: sex workers are not idealists any more than they are victims, neither have evil procurers and paedophiles created the whole industry. As Tracy Quan puts it:

Anyone who travels to a country, believing that the 'streets are paved with gold' is operating out of some form of greed, desire or ambition.... There is a saying among the jaded: 'You can't con someone who isn't trying to get away with something', (personal communication, September 28, 1995)

ABOLITIONISTS CREATING AND MANIPULATING STEREOTYPES

There are now a number of anti-trafficking groups. Not all use an emotive discourse to push an abolitionist, fundamentalist agenda, but some are rooted in the ideology of Catherine MacKinnon (1987) and Kathleen Barry (1981) wherein all sex is prostitution and all prostitution is a violation of human rights – whatever the workers might care to say about it. 'Trafficking' is one of the monsters evoked (like sex tourism and child prostitution) since Western sex workers

on our own turf have used our own structures of support and advocacy to challenge some of the middle-class feminists who claim to represent us. Abolitionists have created a new 'other' by victimizing Asian workers and children to enforce the moral condemnation of prostitution, with broad implications for all sex trade workers, freedom of sexual expression and HIV/AIDS prevention.

The trafficking argument depends on the presence of third parties coercing women into prostitution: if any money is offered to the women or their parents it should be as pitiful as possible, whereas the profits being made from their sexual labor should be as enormous as possible. Media reports also emphasize the involvement of organized crime such as Hong Kong triads in the sex industry (e.g. *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 14 December 1995), making a conceptual leap to assume the prostitutes are forced into the work and their lives ruined. According to the *Bangkok Post* (30 October 1995) and *ECPAT Bulletin* (25 November 1995), 'Experts [sic] speak of syndicates systematically buying children from families in poor villages all over Asia, of gangs working in cooperation with police and immigration officials to transport their purchases across national borders and of sophisticated networks of paedophiles exchanging information.'

It is the prohibition of prostitution and restrictions on travel which attract organized crime and create the possibilities for large profits, as well as creating the prostitutes' need for protection and assistance; it is the erotic-pathetic stereotype of the Asian prostitute which creates the possibility for middle-class women's trafficking hysteria. Logically there is no difference between 'debt-bonded' Asian workers and Australian workers choosing to work for Hong Kong triads for more money than they could get in Sydney: it is racism which says that the former are victims and the latter agents. Even the East European workers now being chronically exploited all over the world are rarely constructed as victims in the same way. In Southeast Asia, middle-class feminist groups still claim to represent sex workers and women's NGOs are involved in the anti-trafficking lobby (see, for example, Sancho and Layador 1993). While there are also splits among women's NGOs, these women are often happy to direct attention on to trafficking and Western/Japanese sex tourism and away from the local (largest) part of industry. Anti-trafficking groups such as ECPAT and the Global Alliance (GAATW) do not support abolition per se and are concerned with extreme cases of coercion. However the vagueness of definitions and lack of involvement of the workers themselves enabled the Coalition (CATW) to gather support for a radical abolitionist agenda. The Coalition and a number of other NGOs formed a network, supported by UNESCO, called the NGO Coalition Against Exploitation of Women, to take a petition to the Beijing UN Conference on Women in 1995.

BEIJING, THE UN CONVENTION AND SEX WORKERS' VOICES

The Coalition's petition is for a new 'Convention Against Sexual Exploitation' to replace the 1949 UN Convention on the Suppression of Trafficking in Persons and the Exploitation of the Prostitution of Others. The 1949 Convention originated with the 'exposure' of the White Slave Trade (which was later shown to be negligible) by Jewish feminists and the social purity movement in Europe (Truong 1990; Goldman 1970). It 'rests mainly at the conceptual level, i.e. that prostitution is a form of promiscuity which offends public morality, the family and the community' (Truong 1990: p. 86), and it considers the prostitute as a uniform category, as a source of evil separate from the socioeconomic environment. Needless to say it ignores the client.

The new Convention Against Sexual Exploitation was previously proposed by Barry at the UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna, 1993. The proposed change would ban prostitution completely, not just forced prostitution: 'Legalized prostitution ... is an open door for traffickers' claims Janice Raymond, an activist with the US-based 'Coalition Against Trafficking in Women' (Hornblower 1993: p. 24). Their petition states:

It is a fundamental human right to be free of sexual exploitation in all its forms, from prostitution, sex tourism, trafficking in women, mail-order bride selling and pornography to incest, wife abuse, sexual harassment and rape. ... Sexual exploitation abrogates a person's human right to dignity, equality, autonomy and physical and mental well-being; it preys on women and children made vulnerable by poverty and economic development policies and practices, on refugees and displaced persons, and on women in the migrating process; and serves as a vehicle for racism and Northern domination (NGO Coalition Against Exploitation of Women, 1995).

Sexual exploitation has taken on a life of its own, and everything is conveniently muddled by putting prostitution and pornography in the same sentence as rape and incest so that people's obvious anathema to non-consensual sex is extended by implication to all forms of commercial transactions involving sex. 'To equate professional prostitution with domestic violence is to diminish the horror of the helpless; to equate choiceful sex work with the violence of criminal greed is to deny the value and dignity of the work some women choose to do ... it is the criminalizing of sex work that is partly responsible for society's negative attitudes to ALL women's sexuality' (Helen Vicqua, Scarlet Alliance internal communication, 19 May 1995). Meanwhile, the Network of Sex Work Projects (NWSP) coordinated a sex worker presence at Beijing to counter the anti-trafficking lobby, struggling against a Chinese government which initially did not allow visas for sex workers and prevaricated in every way possible to put people off attending. Most sex worker groups do not currently have resources such as E-mail access, whereas the anti-trafficking lobby is very professional, well organized and au fait with the UN system. However, through perseverance the NWSP did finally receive accreditation for the main UN conference. According to the Network:

The dominant ideology about prostitution within the United Nations is that prostitution is a form of sexual exploitation which should be abolished. This view has been legitimized and passed into resolutions and laws at conferences such as Beijing with no input at all from sex workers themselves. Many sex workers feel that it is time to demand that we are heard in such a significant international forum. More than being simply heard it is essential to form some resolutions which reflect our demands for human rights, and have those passed rather than the resolutions which lead to repressive measures to abolish prostitution. To do this sex workers and their supporters need to work to prepare resolutions and to lobby delegates for support at the conference (Doezema 1995).

Abolitionists need to hear that most sex workers, including male and transgen-der sex workers and men who work with female clients, do the job willingly and do very well out of it relative to other occupations. They need to hear that clients of sex workers come from all walks of life (and include women), they are not monsters, and sex workers as a rule do not hate them. It happens quite frequently that workers and clients develop a personal relationship outside of work, and Asian workers in expatriate bars commonly construct their relationships with clients in emotional, as well as commercial, terms (Law 1996: pp. 80-2).

What can we conclude about the Coalition? Is there an element of titillation in their focus on sex workers, when similar problems are faced by migrant domestic workers and others? Is there an element of self-flagellation due to middle-class white guilt when faced with the rape of Asia by white capitalists? 'Where there is an overlay of North-South exploitation – the Western tourist ruining innocent paradise with his credit card and unleashed libido – this version plays easily in certain, well-meaning ears' (Black 1994: p. 12). At the same time the assumptions of passivity, stupidity and silence on the part of the Asian workers underline the inherent racism and class bias in the Coalition's arguments. In the end, the Beijing declaration was largely decided on before the actual conference and achieved very little in terms of sexual liberation or acknowledgement of women's sexuality due to the strength of Islamic, Catholic and

other reactionary groups. Sex work (addressed in terms of trafficking and sexual exploitation) was dealt with in the section on violence against women: existing instruments were recommended to be strengthened and the victims of trafficking supported (UN 1995 Section D). Trafficking is viewed as a global conspiracy which can be dismantled through international co-operation and the paternalistic rehabilitation of victims (assumed female and helpless). The small but staunch sex worker presence at Beijing managed to make a significant impact at the NGO Forum and the UN conference. Some anti-trafficking groups, including GAATW, worked with the sex workers to defeat Section 230(0) of the Draft Platform for Action and to avoid the creation of the new abolitionist Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Sexual Exploitation as proposed by the Coalition Against Trafficking in Women.

SUMMARY

In the aftermath of Beijing the hysteria is fading, and the abolitionists, especially the CATW, are again out on a limb. The general interest in the topic has spurred more research and more evidence, which has shown up the predominance of local clients and the relatively small part played by 'sex tourists'. It is increasingly hard to maintain unsubstantiated rumors, although those who don't believe the hype are placed in a difficult position of proving a negative (JCNCA 1995: p. 53), while police deficiencies and corruption, the cunning of paedophiles, etc. can be conveniently blamed from the other side for the lack of evidence.

Migration of female labor is increasing due to processes of economic globalization and removal of political boundaries, and clearly this process is accompanied by an increasing degree of coercion and exploitation of women due to prevailing systems of sex and gender in sending and receiving countries such as Thailand. The Utrecht conference statement made a valid point that force and not the type of work should be the issue in 'trafficking' and goes on:

... the individual right to self-determination includes the ability and the right of the individual to decide to work as a prostitute. In order to reduce the vulnerability of prostitutes and others to trafficking in this context, prostitution and other activities in the informal sphere should be recognized as a form of work. Consequently, prostitutes and other sex workers have the right to safe working conditions through the use of occupational health and safety and other labor ordinances (1994).

Truong argues that the industrial production of sexual services requires a continuous supply of sexual labor: 'The effect of this process has been an increase in the use of violence to locate and control sexual labor' (1990: p. 201). Therefore, boundaries and workable definitions (preferably in line with ages of consent and employment) regarding 'underage' sexual labor and controls over the use of force will continue to be necessary. Existing laws and Conventions cover the issues of slavery and similar practices, non-consensual sex and the exploitation of children (Metzenrath 1995), and there is already a Special Rapporteur on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution and Child Pornography. All states need to ratify and apply (if they have not done so) these conventions, and laws should be introduced or enforced to control the sale of children by their parents, preferably before the sale occurs so that sex workers are not expected to finger their own families to the authorities.

All states need to start decriminalizing prostitution (without creating new categories of good and bad prostitutes), applying occupational health and safety standards to workplaces (including provisions for street workers) and working toward eradicating discrimination. Restrictive immigration policies contribute to the exploitation of migrants and should be reviewed: sex workers should have the right to travel freely and obtain working visas regardless of ethnic background. Governments should follow Australia in funding organizations which provide support and information to

Asian workers, and these workers should be supported to form their own groups to achieve greater autonomy (and participate in and strengthen the Asia-Pacific network for sex workers' rights). International networks of sex work projects should aim to inform workers about working conditions and choices. Finally, where sex workers *have* been forced to work against their will they should be offered every support and free transport to their place of origin if they so wish (see also PROS et al. 1995).

It is important to distinguish different types of sex trade work using clearly documented participatory research that involves the workers. Blanket statements about prostitution and the exploitation of women are propaganda from a political agenda which seeks to control the way people think and behave. The situations which the anti-traffickers rail against, insofar as they do exist, are a result of economic, political and gender inequalities, and it is those inequalities which should be our central cause for concern. The vast range of sex industries and contexts requires an understanding of diversity and difference and a realization that prohibition and unitary 'moral values' are part of the problem, not the solution.

ABBREVIATIONS

CATW	The Coalition Against Trafficking in Women
ECPAT	End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism
GAATW	The Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women
HIV/AIDS	Human Immune-Deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IMP	Indonesia Resources and Information Project
IWDA	International Women's Development Agency
JCNCA	Joint Committee on the National Crime Authority (Canberra)
JSC	Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade (Canberra)
NGO	Non-government organization
PCV	Prostitutes' Collective of Victoria (Melbourne)
PROS	Prostitutes' Rights Organization for Sex Workers (Sydney)
QEWU	Queer and Esoteric Workers' Union (Sydney/Canberra)
SLORC	State Law and Order Restoration Council (Burma)
SWOP	Sex Workers Outreach Project (Sydney)
WISE	Workers in Sex Employment in the ACT (Canberra)

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